The Antioch Church



Scripture Reference: Acts 11:19-30 and 12:25-13:3

Suggested Theme: Follow Barnabas' example and encourage one another.

Memory Verse: "So comfort each other and give each other strength, just as you are doing now." 1 Thessalonians 5:11, ICB

Story Overview:

Barnabas was known as a great encourager. When the church in Jerusalem heard about the new Gentile believers in Antioch, they sent Barnabas to help. He encouraged the Antioch believers, and even more people followed King Jesus. Then he travelled to Tarsus and found Paul so that Paul could come and help, too. This was a great mission-minded church. Followers of Jesus were first called Christians at this church.

Background Study:

Click here for an overview of the Book of Acts

After the Stoning of Stephen, many followers of King Jesus began to leave Jerusalem to escape the persecution led by Saul (Acts 8:1-4). Wherever they went, they taught others about Jesus and established churches. Since the first followers of Jesus were Jewish, they travelled to places where other Jews lived and told them about Jesus. But some (men from Cyprus and Cyrene) went to places where Gentiles (people not born into a Jewish family) lived and established churches in these places. One such church was in the city of Antioch. Many Gentiles became followers of Jesus in that city.

The church in Jerusalem wanted to learn more about what was happening, so they sent a man named Barnabas to Antioch. This was no easy trip as Antioch is 758 kilometres (471 miles) north of Jerusalem. Barnabas had gained a reputation as a generous man who sold his own property to help support the church in Jerusalem. He was a Levite, and his name means "son of encouragement" (Acts 4:36).

Upon arrival in Antioch, Barnabas found a thriving church and went on to encourage them in their faith. To encourage means to do or say something that gives someone courage or confidence. During his stay, many more people were brought to the Lord.

Barnabas' Teachings at Antioch (Acts 11:23-24):

1. God was already at work in Antioch, and there was evidence of His grace.
2. Barnabas recognised God's work and rejoiced in it. This was no contest with Jerusalem.
3. Barnabas encouraged them to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts.
4. Barnabas' life was a living example of his message.

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1. He was a good man.
2. The Spirit led him.
3. He had strong faith.

Barnabas also travelled northwest to Tarsus to find Saul (later known by his Roman name, Paul) and return him to work with the Antioch church. Saul would have fit in with this congregation because, since becoming a follower of Jesus, he had also been teaching about Jesus. He had likely taught Gentiles (Saul Becomes a Christian). Barnabas and Saul worked together in Antioch for a year, and many people began to follow King Jesus. Here in Antioch, followers of Jesus began to be known by the description "CHRISTIANS" (Acts 11:26). This might have been a name first said in jest or derision by outsiders, but it is a name that continues even now.

One of Jesus's followers from Jerusalem, Agabus, had the gift of prophecy. This is the first time this gift is mentioned in the Book of Acts. In the New Testament, prophecy usually involves proclaiming God's message, but Agabus prophesied by telling about something that would happen in the future. In this case, he prophesied about a famine that would strike the entire Roman world.

One side note about Agabus is that, years later, he and Saul (by then known as Paul) would meet again. This meeting would take place in Caesarea at the home of Philip the Evangelist when Paul was on another journey.

The Christians in the Antioch church wanted to help their fellow Christians who would suffer because of the famine. They commissioned Barnabas and Saul to collect the funds in Antioch and take them to Jerusalem. The Jerusalem church seems to have acted as a collection point for funds to help Christians in the Judea region. Acts 11:30 is the first mention of "elders", or church leaders, in the Book of Acts.

But now, at the direction of the Antioch church, Barnabas and Saul delivered the funds to Jerusalem and returned to Antioch, bringing John Mark with them (Acts 12:25-13:1). Many events recorded in Acts were taking place in Jerusalem at this time. Although not specifically stated, Paul and Barnabas could have even been in Jerusalem then.

- Perhaps Peter would have experienced his Miraculous Escape from Prison while Barnabas and Saul were in Jerusalem.
- Perhaps Barnabas and Saul were at John Mark's mother's house when Peter knocked at the door (Acts 12:12-13). John Mark was also Barnabas' cousin (Colossians 4:10), so perhaps this is why he accompanied Barnabas and Saul back to Antioch.

Although Peter and others continue to live in Jerusalem, we find that the attention of the Book of Acts now shifts from Jerusalem to Antioch and the missionary work that originates from there. The Antioch church was healthy and active and would eventually become the launching point for each of Paul's missionary journeys. Even after Paul was long gone, the church remained central in early church history. The ancient city of Antioch is now known as Antakya, and it is located in southern Turkey near the Syrian border.

Way to Introduce the Story:

Explain and discuss "encouragement"– to do or say something that gives someone courage or confidence. Older children might look this up in the dictionary. Give each child a piece of paper and a pencil. Explain that you will give them three minutes to list as many encouraging words or phrases as possible. Encourage them while they are writing! That will give them answers, too. At the end of three minutes, see how many the children came up with. Younger children can call out phrases, and you can write them on the board. "Someone in the book of Acts was so good at encouraging people that his name meant 'son of encouragement'. The church in Jerusalem asked him to go to a new church in the city of Antioch and

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encourage them there. Let's listen to the story…"

The Story:

Good News: What do you want to do when you hear good news? Many people heard the Good News about Jesus Christ in the Book of Acts. Once they heard the Good News, they wanted to share it with other people.

The Good News for Jews in Jerusalem:

There were many followers of Jesus in Jerusalem. They were Jews (God's chosen people that we read about in the Old Testament). Before following Jesus, the Jews only knew about the story of God in the Old Testament. But now they understood that God had sent His son, Jesus, to them. Some people did not like that the Jews were starting to follow Jesus, so they began to hurt them (persecute them) because of their beliefs.

Good News for other places:

Because of the persecution, many followers of Jesus left Jerusalem and moved to other places. Wherever they went, they told other people the Good News about Jesus. Some followers of Jesus moved to Antioch and told others there about Jesus.

They shared the Good News with Gentiles:

Gentiles are people who are not born to Jewish families. But it did not matter if people were Jews or Gentiles. The Good News of Jesus is for everyone!

Barnabas, the great encourager:

The church in Jerusalem began to hear more and more about Gentiles who were beginning to follow Jesus in other places, like the city of Antioch. The church wanted to send someone to go and learn about them and encourage them. To encourage someone is to do or say something that gives them courage or confidence.

Since the people in Antioch needed encouragement, who could be better to send than a man called "Barnabas?" Barnabas was a good and generous man full of the Holy Spirit. Barnabas was very good at encouraging people. The name "Barnabas" even means "son of encouragement."

So Barnabas travelled to the city of Antioch. Barnabas was happy that many people were sharing the Good News of Jesus with Gentiles when he arrived. Barnabas encouraged them to "remain true to the Lord with all their hearts." While Barnabas was there, many people became followers of Jesus.

Barnabas encouraged Paul:

While Barnabas was in Antioch, he travelled to the city of Tarsus to look for a man named Saul (soon to be known as Paul). Saul used to be an enemy of Jesus, but now he was a follower. He believed the Good News of Jesus, too! Barnabas brought Paul back to Antioch, and both of them taught great numbers of people.

What would you call that person if a person hears the Good News of Jesus and follows and obeys Jesus? Antioch was the first place where people who followed Jesus were called "Christians." Many exciting events were happening in Antioch, with many people learning to follow Jesus Christ.

Christians in Jerusalem were the first to share the Good News with others. They were the ones who sent Barnabas to encourage the people of Antioch. It was time for Christians in other places to share with Christians in Jerusalem.

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In Antioch, a prophet named “Agabus” prophesied that a famine would soon happen. A famine is when few crops grow, and many people go hungry. That meant people in Jerusalem would go hungry.

The Christians in Antioch wanted to help, so they collected money and asked Barnabas and Saul to take it to the church leaders in Jerusalem.

And that is how Good News and Encouragement work. When people hear good news, they want to share it. When people are encouraged, they want to encourage others.

How can you encourage someone this week?

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Ways to Tell the Story:

This story can be told using various methods. Always remain true to the facts found in the Bible, but help children connect to its meaning by using drama, visual aids, voice inflection or other group participation.

Be selective. Each teacher is unique, so only use the illustrations that best relate to how YOU tell the story in THIS lesson. Too many illustrations can be confusing, so eliminate any that cover other stories or details you do not wish to emphasise in this lesson.

Click here for visual aids and more storytelling methods.

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Review and Reflection Questions:

Review questions help children remember and know the facts of a story. Reflection questions encourage them to internalise the meaning and implications for their lives. Asking at least one of each type of question can help strengthen a child’s spiritual development and help them connect to God. Click here to learn more about review and reflection questions.

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Review:

- What does the name Barnabas mean? (Son of encouragement)
- What does it mean to ‘encourage’ someone? (To give someone hope, support, or courage through your words or actions)
- Who did Barnabas go and get to help him with the Church work in Antioch? (Saul / Paul)
- Where were followers of Jesus first called Christians? (Antioch)
- What is a missionary? (A Christian who goes to another place to share the good news of Jesus or encourage and work with Christians there)
- Who chose Barnabas and Saul to be missionaries? (The Holy Spirit)
- How long did Barnabus and Saul stay to teach and help the church in Antioch? (One year)
- What does this story show you about believers?
- What does this story show you about the Holy Spirit?

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Reflection:

- Why do you think the church in Antioch needed encouragement?
- Have Christians from another place ever visited you and your church? How did it make you feel when they came to visit?
- In some places, being a Christian is very hard. They might be in danger because they follow Jesus, and people may mistreat them. What kind of words or actions might encourage these Christians? What would you tell one of these Christians to encourage them?
- Can you share an example of something a person might say to 'encourage' someone else? When have you been encouraged by someone?
- How do you feel when someone encourages you?
- Who do you know that you could encourage? Would you use words or encourage someone in another way?
- What do you want to learn more about from this story?
- What question do you have for God about this story?

Prayer:

It is important to guide children in learning how to pray. In prayer, children can connect with God and learn that He hears and answers them. God can become a lifelong friend who is with them every moment of their lives. Try using a variety of prayer methods from time to time so that the children can learn to connect with God in different ways. Note that you can pray at any time throughout your lesson. A variety of prayer methods are found here.

Song Suggestions:

- Love is Something if You Give it Away
- I Am a C-H-R-I-S-T-I-A-N
- ABC: Jesus Died for You and Me Song
- J-E-S-U-S Song
- Ha-la-la-la Song
- I've Got Something in My Pocket Song
- Hello Hello Song
- This Little Light of Mine Song
- Refer to the Song Page on this website for more song options.

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Activities and Crafts:

- How to choose the best learning activities for my teaching situation.
- Visit the activities and songs pages for additional activities and crafts.

Activities:

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- This is not a long passage of Scripture, so the teacher could take the opportunity to read it directly from the Bible or allow older children to take turns reading.
- The teacher or good readers could read a few verses from the story, and then the children could draw what they had just heard. If you can print the verses beforehand, the children could draw directly on the papers. One of these passages would work well:
  - Acts 11:22-24
  - Acts 11:25-26 or
  - Acts 11:29-30 and 12:25
- Encourage the children today (and every day) genuinely
- Use an atlas or online maps to find the modern cities of Jerusalem, Antakya, and Tarsus.
- To review, you or the children can draw a large outline of Paul on a whiteboard or piece of paper (even drawing with a stick in the sand works fine if you are outside). Then, after you have taught the lesson, ask the children to think about what they have just learned from the Bible. Have them write descriptive words or draw pictures inside and around the outlined illustration of Paul. When you see what the children are writing or drawing, you may be surprised or encouraged by what insights they have picked up from the story. This is also a good opportunity to correct or add to anything you might not have covered as well as you could have when you were teaching.



- If you prefer, you can download and print the illustration of Paul provided here and then have the children write and draw on it for the review.
- Click here for the 16 lessons about the Life of Paul grouped together.

Invite the children to respond to this story using the adaptable “God’s Story” printable reflection page. Free printables for this story.

Crafts:

- Decorate cards and then write notes of encouragement to people in your church.

Print and use these free bookmarks, trading cards or timelines. Free printables for this story.

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Other Online Resources:

- Colouring page and puzzle worksheets (Calvary Curriculum)
- Game: Instructions for a game that teaches encouragement (ministry-to-children.com)
- Review: Create a “passport” that covers the life of Paul. Good visual ideas and activities. Could be split up to go with several lessons or taught all together as a review of previous lessons concerning Paul found (kidsbibledebjackson.blogspot.co.nz)
- More to Think About: A good article on encouragement (cyc-net.org/cyc-online)

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